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ON THE COVER
The Bakken Museum in Minneapolis has been a popular site for gardenside weddings.
Photo by Julie Dukowitz

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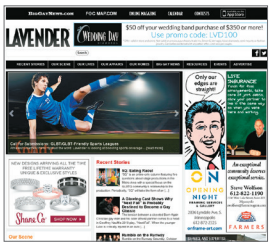

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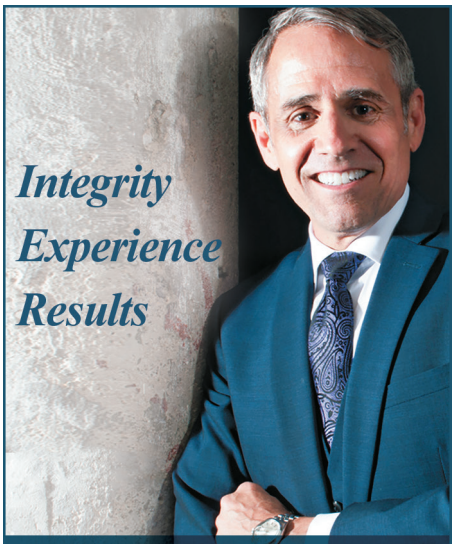

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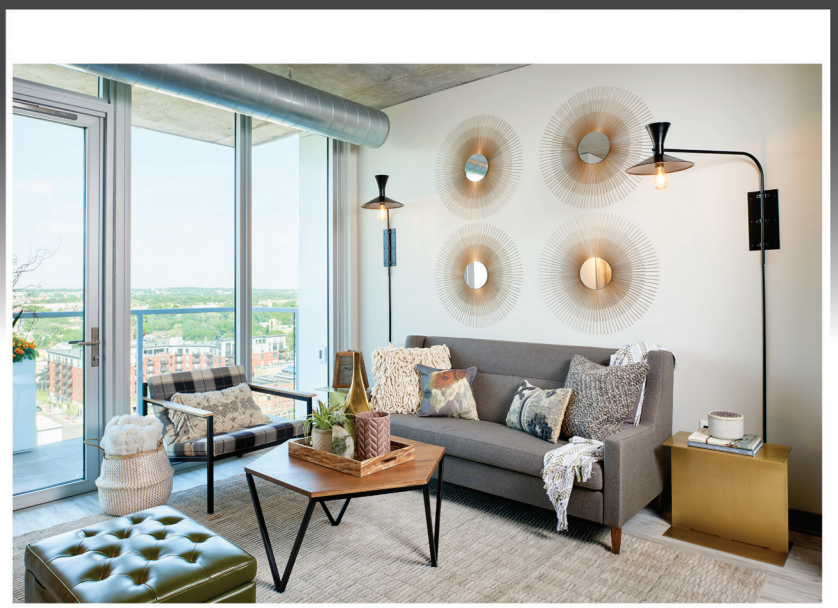

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY CHRIS TARBOX

I Now Pronounce You Stylish And Fabulous

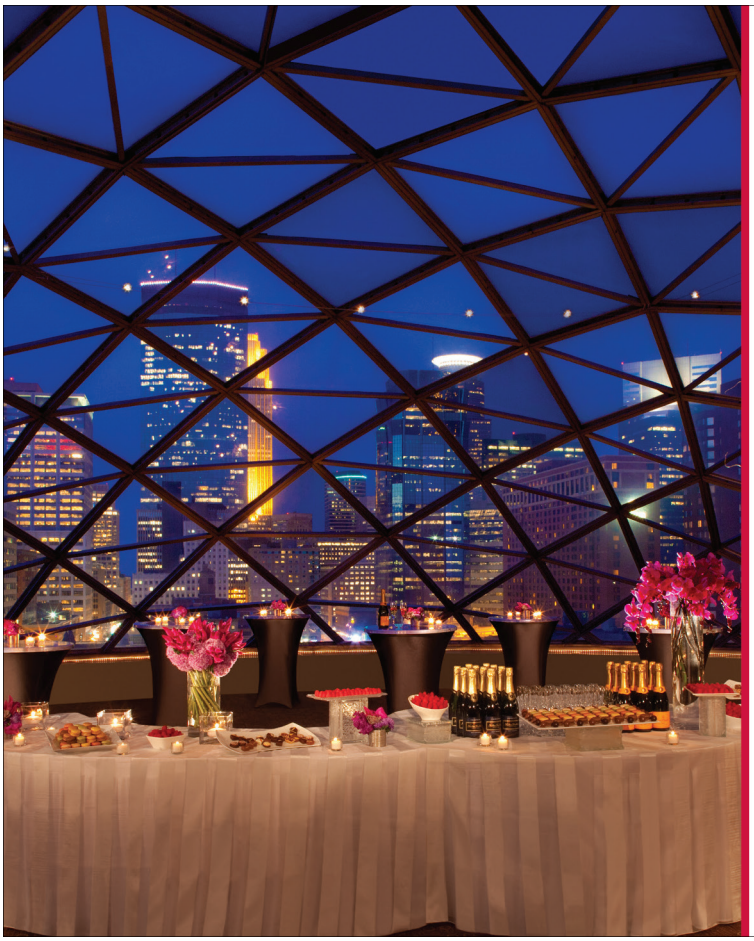
From engagement to reception, a lot goes into making a wedding as memorable and fabulous as possible. When you plan what to wear, where to say "I do", and what kind of fancy cake you're going to get, you gotta make sure that everything falls in line with your own personal sense of style.

It's no small feat looking good walking down that aisle and having that first dance, so you need as many resources as possible to make your nuptials absolutely unforgettable. So allow your good friends at Lavender to help out with our 2018 Wedding Style issue!

This issue, we take a look at a number of locally-based companies that will give you a wedding to remember: we explore the hidden gem of a garden-side wedding venue with The Bakken Museum in Minneapolis; we tease our sweet tooth with the scrumptious sugary surprises of Angel Food Bakery and Amy's Cupcake Shoppe; and we learn about some of the latest wedding style trends courtesy of trend specialist Sara Rogers.

Also, Carla Waldemar takes us on a trip to the wonders of the Ukraine, John Townsend previews some of the big productions of the Minnesota Fringe Festival, and we take a look at a Day In The Life of epidemiologist Megan Slater.

So if you're planning a wedding and you and your partner want to make it a day to remember, let the 2018 Wedding Style issue be your guide! ■



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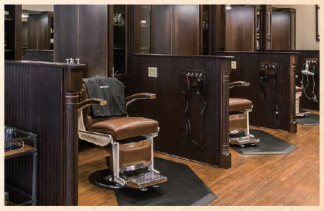

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A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

Still Star-Crossed, After All These Years

I saw *West Side Story* in 1957. I still have my *Playbill*. Based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* the drama of star-crossed lovers that opened the Guthrie's 2017-2018 season. Their season's finale, fittingly, is *West Side Story*, Montagues and Capulets replaced now by New York 1950's gangs Jets and Sharks.

With an admirable if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it approach, director Taj hewed to the original script. Some language and actions seem almost quaint today, as when the Jets leader, proposing a rumble asserts, "New protocality calls for a war council to decide on a weapon," and one wonders whether the Sharks "might ask for bottles or knives or zip guns." Times change; the fervor is timeless. Sixty or six hundred years ago, "This turf is small but it's all we got," or "Without a gang, you're an orphan," would resonate in many a village or tribe.

Most lines don't need tweaking to be up to speed today. Officer Krupke, one of four adults in the play, pulls rank on a Shark, growling, "I got the badge, you got the skin." In "America", the PR girls counter one thinking of going back "home," with a litany including, "I'll bring TV to San Juan," and the retort, "If there's a current to turn on," and, "Nobody knows in America / Puerto Rico's *in* America." Brilliant, and even more chilling in 2018 than 1957.

Two astute changes from the original: First, the gang members are diversified, emphasizing turf more than ethnicity. Both are outcasts, the Sharks merely the lesser of two evils in the eyes of the authorities; and the viewer gains a clearer understanding of why these youngsters would fight to the death over a patch of tenement street neither owns.

The second is the "rebooting" of Jerome Robbins' choreography, superbly achieved by Maija Garcia. Star class raised to super nova; explosive, athletic, balletic, never overwrought or extraneous. At the fatal, heart-stopping conclusion of the gangs' rumble the curtain drops for Intermission.

At this point, recounts a friend, a Broadway actor also at the Winter Garden Theater in 1957, the fellow seated in front of him turned around. It was actor/comedian Paul Lynde, who, in his notorious snarky voice cracked, "Ya gonna' stay?"

They did. I did. And so will you.

West Side Story will run at the Guthrie through August 26. ■

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A DAY in the Life

BY CHRIS TARBOX

MEGAN SLATER

Name: Megan Slater

Age: 36

Where did you grow up? Willmar, MN

Where do you live? St. Paul, MN

Who do you live with? Currently, my friend/roommate Haley. As of September 1, I'll be living with my girlfriend Jillian.

What is your occupation? I'm an epidemiologist working as the project director of the Alcohol Epidemiologic Data System, a contract that provides support to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), which is a part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We conduct research (and provide research support) on the public health implications of alcohol use and misuse.

When did you come out? Age 29

How'd that go? It went as well as I could have ever imagined, and I have been so much happier since then. I feel very lucky to have friends and family who are incredibly loving and supportive.

When do you wake up? Earlier than I need to. Lately it has been around 6 a.m. when the sun wakes me up.

Phone alarm or old school alarm? No alarm needed generally, but on very rare occasions I use my phone alarm.

What's the first thing you do in the morning? Bathroom, then breakfast!

Breakfast? Always. My go-to is either plain yogurt with fruit and homemade granola or a smoothie.

Coffee? No.

Cream or no? On the rare occasion that I have some coffee, yes, I prefer cream.

How do you spend your commute: Walking… to the kitchen to grab breakfast and set up my computer because I work remotely from home full time.

If your job were like a yearbook, what would you be voted? (Class clown, best dressed, most annoying, etc.) Best email communicator.

What inspires you? People who love life and share their positive energy with the world. Being around people like that inspires me to be a better human.

Do you eat your lunch while working or take a break? Take a break

Is your work space tidy or a hot mess? Tidy

What's been your favorite job? My current gig is hard to top. I can work from anywhere, put my six years of graduate education to good use, and get paid more than I ever thought I would.

Who are your heroes? The positive, inspiring people in my life that I mentioned above.

Favorite weeknight meal: Go out, take out, or cook in? Cook in. I love cooking.

Most embarrassing moment: I honestly can't think of one. No doubt I've had my fair share of embarrassing moments over the years, but nothing really sticks out in my memory as being more embarrassing.

On a usual weeknight, you are doing what? Getting my exercise on, followed by cooking dinner and catching up on some Hulu/Netflix (*The Handmaid's Tale* is a current favorite).

Bedtime: Usually between 10 and 11 p.m.

Favorite weekend activity: Doing something active outside with friends or family.

What are you most proud of and why? The first things that came to my mind were the typical personal accomplishments that one might consider, like earning a PhD or playing college softball (Go Bison!), but if I'm honest, the "why" behind these things seems inadequate. I think I'm most proud of the way I've treated the people in my life with respect and love. I know I've fallen short on this many times (mostly with annoying strangers), but overall, I think I've done a fairly good job of this. Why am I proud of this? Because this world can be a pretty cruel place to live in at times, and any time someone treats another person with kindness, it makes the world a little bit better.

Words of wisdom to share: I think the answer above sums it up quite well.

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Two very different but very beautiful musical styles will be performed by terrific female vocalists in the Chanhassen Dinner Theatres' Fireside space for the Concert Series. The wonderful Patty Peterson rises to the challenge of "Babs" with some of Barbra Streisand's biggest hits, such as *People* from early in her career when she made had her mark on Broadway with *Funny Girl; Evergreen*, the Oscar-winning tune from *A Star is Born;* to what is one of the Great One's unrecognized great renditions: the theme song from her underrated 1970 film, *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*.

In striking contrast, a week later, the talented Pamela McNeill, Mary Jane Alm, and Jeff Engholm vivify the mystical and rambunctious sounds of Fleetwood Mac. Remember when the group performed the rousing "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" at the Clinton Inaugural bash 25 years ago as a sign of hope and optimism? And few rock groups of the time captured the ethereal sense expressed so magnetically in tunes like "Gypsy", "Rhiannon", and the echoes sung by Stevie Nicks in contrast to the perfect forefront vocals by Christine McVie. And of course, that most magical tune, "Sara". All of these dreamy numbers are among those slated to be performed.

HAND TO GOD

Through Aug. 19
Jungle Theater, 2951 Lyndale Ave. S.
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www.jungletheater.com

This Best Play nominee for the 2015 Tony Award is receiving its area premiere at the Jungle Theater. Playwright Robert Askins pits his seemingly low-key teen protagonist, Jason, against the youth's small town pastor, as well as a bully. His weapon: a foul-mouthed puppet he manipulates to vent his dismay over the status quo. Indeed, this is not what the local Christian Puppet Ministry had in mind! Riley O'Toole played Jason to acclaim in Salt Lake City last year, and reprises his role in Minneapolis under the direction of the Jungle's Resident Director Christina Baldwin.

Chanhassen Dinner Theatres Concert Series. Photo courtesy of Chanhassen Dinner Theatres

Hand to God has been compared to the musical *The Book of Mormon* for its passive-aggressive take on conservative Christianity in middle-America. (Some of course, don't see Mormonism as Christian, but that's another discussion.) Opinions range on Askins' intent but it is generally agreed that he effectively creates a vivid characterization of a suppressed id underneath Jason's fragile ego. The play has also been noted as an examination of teenager with a serious personality disorder—the role is obviously quite a challenge for the actor, who must also be skilled in sock puppetry.

Other cast members are Tracey Maloney, Kris Nelson, Eric Sharp, and C.Michael Menge. *Hand to God* also reflects issues of grief and financial duress. Its selection for the Jungle's season demonstrates the theater's commitment to contemporary plays that have received national recognition in other cities. Askins' play also won the Off-Broadway Alliance for Best New Play.

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www.guthrietheater.org

The art of drag has come under attack on two fronts: feminists who call it a mockery of women and social conservatives who want gender codes to be strictly codified. However, drag is an irrepressible force that emerges throughout human history. In recent decades, thanks to more liberal attitudes around cross-dressing and what was once called "transvestism", drag has become more mainstream. Moreover, market capitalism is a driving force behind that, as evidenced dollars spent in service of the many profit streams that drag provides.

In this vein, it has also come to be revealed that there is a pool of cisgender men, many of whom are primarily heterosexual, into cross-dressing. Beyond that, there are cisgender men who are primarily attracted only to those who do drag or are transgender, as reviewed in this column just over two years for the documentary *Finding Vogue Moran*. As interest in drag and profits increase, it seems to be taking its place as a solid mainstream institution. This is something unimaginable a generation ago.

Playwright Matthew Lopez seems to have an instinct for this progression with his comedy-drama *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, now in its area premiere at the Guthrie Theater. The play's protagonist, Casey (Jayson Speters), is an Elvis-impersonator in the Florida panhandle. Unfortunately, he loses his gig and the rent is due and his wife is pregnant! Therefore, necessity demands a shift in perspective if he is to continue a solid career in show biz. His solution: seizing a lucky break to do drag in a straight bar not located in a large metropolitan area. Let's face it: money talks.

The Big G's new Associate Artistic Director Jeffrey Meanza has helmed the proscenium staging. He shares, "I am so taken with this play's joyous spirit, keen wit and big heart. I am surprised and inspired by how the play never apologizes for what it sets out to accomplish: to imagine a world where the most unlikely cast of characters finds a way to build something together in the most unexpected places."

The Legend of Georgia McBride. Image courtesy of Guthrie Theater

MAMMA MIA!

Through Aug. 5
Ordway Center, 345 Washington St., St. Paul
651-224-4222
www.ordway.org

Mamma Mia! Here we go again! But wait! The buzz is that the Ordway's in house production is very different than any previous production you've seen of the ABBA musical! Three great singer-actresses—Erin Schwab and Ann Michels of the Twin Cities and Christine Sherrill of the Las Vegas production—play the central trio of women in midlife crisis. Moreover, the Ordway's in-house productions are without exception, Broadway caliber as was in evidence with their revivals of Damn Yankees and Beauty and the Beast, among others.

Rod Kaats, Ordway Producing Artistic Director, says of *Mamma Mia!:* "We've assembled a group of artists from the Twin Cities and beyond who are nothing short of amazing. Our stage production opens just as the movie sequel premieres and with new ABBA songs coming out—it's like 'ABBA mania' is spreading across the country! But nothing leaves audiences feeling as exhilarated as a live stage musical—this show is so fun that it's gonna blow the roof off the Ordway!"

It just so happens that ensemble member Joshua James Campbell is a favorite Twin Cities actor of both musicals and straight plays. His first union show was actually *Mamma Mia!* 13 years ago. He also played one of the musical's young romantic male characters, Sky, in Las Vegas. This time around, as an ensemble member *and* understudy for the male leads at the Ordway, Campbell tells us, "It's fun to revisit with all new staging. And very fun to have moved up in age where I now understudy the Dads! This is a completely different staging from the *Mamma Mia!* that everyone has seen. From the costumes, to the cast number, to the set, to the choreography and blocking—everything is new and exciting. There is a focus on all of the ensemble members to flesh out characters. Not just a mob of chorus people, but characters with their own story lines on the Greek Island. The voices in this show are phenomenal. We were reminded on or first day of rehearsal that this show was conceived by a woman, directed by a woman, and stars four very strong women." He adds, "I mean, I dance in flippers and a wet suit! What's not to enjoy?"

LEGALLY BLONDE

Through August 19
Bloomington Center for the Arts
1800 W. Old Shakopee Rd., Bloomington
952-563-8575
www.artistrymn.org

Most people know it as the movie that exponentially increased the star power of Reese Witherspoon. But *Legally Blonde* was also adapted into a major stage musical that may end up becoming a classic in its own right. At Bloomington Center for the Arts, Artistry has cast the talented Angela Steele in the lead role of sorority sister Elle Woods. When left by her ambitious boyfriend, she leaves California and follows him to Harvard Law School. She wants that ring on her finger, and boy is she determined. The legendary Anita Ruth directs the show's musical blend of pop and traditional Broadway style. Angela Timberman, renowned as an accomplished actress—especially in comedy—is directing the show. The extraordinary Joel Sass can always be counted on for a memorable set design. ■

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Marvel Ann and other Queer Icons Return to the 25th Annual Fringe Festival –

ALONG WITH TALENTED YOUNGER ARTISTS AS WELL!

BY JOHN TOWNSEND

The 2018 Minnesota Fringe Festival sees the return of three beloved performers who gave us some of the event's most iconic queer performances in years past: Minneapolitan Heidi Arneson, "Les from Los Angeles", and Dennis LeFebvre, whose Marvel Ann Theatre has been one of the nation's great ensembles in the realm of camp satire. Not to mention direction from Obie-award winner David Drake.

Fringe also features other queer-oriented work, ranging from the biblical to Old Hollywood to an alcoholic gay son's relationship with his mother. Other pieces dealing with immigration, women's history, sex work, and nuclear power are also good bets for engaging performances if you're looking for work that challenges what some would call the status quo.

Fringe, as always, takes place at numerous Twin Cities venues and each show is scheduled at various times and lasts under an hour. That means you can binge on several shows in case you're so inclined.

DANGEROUS WHEN WET: BOOZE, SEX, AND MY MOTHER

Augsburg Studio
625 22nd Ave. S., Minneapolis

Writer-performer Jamie Brickhouse draws from numinous fictional icons beloved in the gay community over a generation ago: gritty Mama Rose from *Gypsy* and the ultra-vivacious Auntie Mame. His solo show draws from his personal battle with alcoholism. Brickhouse says, "By reliving on stage the highs—loss of virginity in Acapulco and drunk dialing Peggy Lee—and lows—an alcoholic suicide attempt inspired by Joan Crawford in *Humoresque* that made and nearly unmade me, it reminds me of my promise to myself to stay sober." He says that "gay men and mothers of gay men seem to love my show." Directed by David Drake, known for his OBIE-winning AIDS crisis solo piece, *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*.

DREAMING

Southern Theater
1420 Washington Ave. S., Minneapolis

Acclaimed dancer Gabriel Mata moves with ethereal fluidity. With the solo piece, *Dreaming*, he says that "the work delves deep beyond images and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep—it intertwines experiences of being a Dreamer (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). The work exposes the psychological and mental results that accompany immigrants' trauma with wit, leaps, kicks and unpredictability. The dance shuffles through episodes that expose psychology between living experiences, aspirations, and dreams."

I NEVER KNOCK

Augsburg Mainstage
625 22nd Ave. S., Minneapolis

Director-writer John Ervin has created a bisexual lead character named Rebecca Belvedere, reminiscent of Tallulah Bankhead, who is actually open about her orientation between the 1920s and '50s. (Bankhead and playwright Tennessee Williams were rare examples being un-closeted in a homophobic era.) Her ex-husband is actually openly gay, but conflict ensues when they both compete for the attention of a young up-and-coming male star. Adding to the mix is a trans stage manager who is, in fact, legally married to a stagehand. Ervin's perspectives reflect how suppressed sexual orientation and gender identity were compelled to exist over half a century ago. *I Never Knock* is an opportunity to grasp just how radically things have changed. We can ask: what was lost and what has been gained? It reminds us there is a whole unspoken queer history that we can never really know.

ITCHY TINGLES

Rarig Center Xperimental
330 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis

Heidi Arneson was one of the major iconoclastic performance artists in the Twin Cities during the 1990s. Her kooky satirical approach was and is her aesthetic signature. She gained a following from performances at the Walker Art Center, Patrick's Cabaret, and the Cedar-Riverside People's Center. Arneson was and still is fascinated by girlhood: its biological mysteries and unspoken curiosities. With her latest, she portrays the acute awareness of the phobia held by many grownups that implies little girls are not to kiss one another on the lips. Her eagerly awaited *Itchy Tingles* looks into the fear of monsters, the secrets of reproduction, and the possibility of impending death during a hot summer on a Midwestern lake.

This one-of-a-kind writer-performer is renowned specifically for her zany personification of girls' behaviors as shown in her solo work and her stage comedy, *Bloodymerryjammyparty*. At the Fringe, she will be accompanied by classical guitarist Tony Hauser's live arrangements of Spanish composer Isaac Albeniz. Rebelliousness and the joy of being guileless will surely reign. How could it not when the setting is a lost land where kids are said to run naked and swim free and where fathers burst with hot lava? Arneson muses on myths of sex and propriety and of the concepts of Good and Evil.

JEANETTE RANKIN: CHAMPION OF PERSISTENCE

Augsburg Studio
625 22nd Ave. S., Minneapolis

Writer-performer J Emily Peabody relates, "Jeanette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress from Montana in 1916, voted against both world wars and challenged injustice at every turn of her 93 years of life. She was full of passion for justice, a thorn in the side of the establishment, a champion of the poor and labor, a fighter for reform, and a dedicated true peace activist. She was personable with a wry sense of humor. You must meet her."

KABOOM

Rarig Center Thrust
330 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis

Sheep Theater, one of the Twin Cities' notable newer small theater companies, takes on ideas drawn from myth and ideas that are bigger than life. And what could be any bigger, yet horrifically possible, than nuclear destruction? *Kaboom* imagines a President who retaliates recklessly using atomic missiles. The gifted composer John Hilsen says he "plans on complimenting the high intensity of the show with music inspired from thrillers of the 1960s."

SUMMERS IN PRAGUE

Rarig Center Arena
330 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis

Kimberly Miller is directing a Sidecar Theatre and Chameleon Theatre Circle co-production that deals with a controversial subject. *Summers in Prague* by Milwaukee's Deanna Strasse involves a 35-year-old female Eng-

lish teacher, played by Samantha Papke, who gets a sudden uncharacteristic fancy to hire a male escort played by Avi Aharoni. Conventional thought asserts that it is men who hire escorts, rather than women. And there's probably truth to this. Nonetheless, it's not talked about much so we don't know what we don't know. Therefore, Strasse is taking us into uncharted territory. The two featured actors are known locally for their fine performances with the Classical Actors Ensemble.

VERTOGRAPH

Rarig Center Thrust
330 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis

Camp creative genius, Dennis LeFebvre, is thrilled about what he relates is the "reboot of a Marvel Ann Theatre's 2004 comedy/adventure about an unhinged 1960s housewife who is catapulted to the Fourth Dimension in a desperate search for her children. Then she comes to grips with her daughter's budding sexuality, her homophobia towards her son (What's the S's for?) and her role as 'Mrs.Ted Anderson'. Underneath the absurdities of galactic cheerleaders, erupting volcanoes, and ghosts, lies a message about the limited choices of women in the Kennedy era, and how having an identity outside the confines of homemaking was considered an act of defiance."

LeFebvre's past Fringe gems include *Funny Sound of Music Girl*, *The Bee-Lievers*, a sordid tale of cultish lesbian bee-worshipers, and *The Secret Life of Kitty Williams* in which LeFebvre himself seemed to have miraculously channeled both Susan Hayward and Shelly Winters into his very biology! We're talking right out of John Waters and then some! And did I mention his *Battle Ax Galactica*?

He observes, "It's interesting, how as we move further and further away from the AIDS epidemic, how drag has not only come back out of the closet, it is as mainstream as apple pie."

WALKING WHILE BLACK IN MOSCOW

Ritz Studio
345 13th Ave. NE, Minneapolis

Les Kurkendaal from Los Angeles has delighted Minnesota Fringe audiences many times over the past several years with his hilarious insights on the intersection between blackness and gayness. His latest relates yet another remarkable personal experience. This time, it's about going to a country known for institutionalized homophobia and counting one's blessings for being an American citizen. Kurkendaal shares that "traveling to Russia was a very eye opening experience. By seeing the way that gays and lesbians are treated there, it made me realize all of the things I take for granted living as a gay man in the U.S. Here I can be married. In Russia you have to keep your relationship a secret. Here I can be out and proud. In Russia, if someone finds out you are gay, you can lose your job and your home. Here we have *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In Russia, a drag queen can be put in prison for performing in drag. It definitely.made me appreciate the life that I have here in the U.S."

THE WOMYN'S MYSTERIES

Minnsky Theater
1517 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis

Chava Curland has been an active contributor to queer and feminist theater in the Twin Cities. Influenced by the structure of medieval mystery and biblical morality plays, she taps into Judeo-Christian archetypes to create See-Saw Theatre Lab's inaugural piece, *The Womyn's Mysteries*. It portrays leaders, lover, killers, mothers, rebels, and prophets. Curland states that "the definition of what it means to be a woman is constantly changing as time passes. In the last year alone, the discussion around women's roles, identity, and power have been consistently at the forefront—especially in light of the #MeToo movement, continued discussion about racial inequality/exclusion in feminism, and increased visibility in the LGBTQA+ community. Through taking these biblical archytypes, and then exploring, bending, expanding, and pushing beyond them, we're creating a platform where we can begin to unpack the challenges and shifting roles women+ face today."

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TRAVEL | BY CARLA WALDEMAR | PHOTO BY CARLA WALDEMAR

Craving Ukraine

Want to spend your European vacation in a land where everyone speaks English; tourists outnumber locals; and restaurants offer menus in five languages? Then skip this story. If, however, you relish discovering the hot spot of tomorrow before the KFCs and Hiltons invade, then inscribe Ukraine on your bucket list.

It's kinda, sorta, Russia-lite. In fact, it was ruled by Russia—then, after driving out the Nazis, by the Soviets until achieving independence in 1991. But hold the applause. After Putin grabbed back the portion called Crimea, the country's pro-EU and pro-Russia factors skirmished until quite recently, halting tourist visits.

Until now.

After a four-year hiatus, today it's safe—and wonderful—to visit. But because the infrastructure is still a bit dicey, the best way to do so is via a Viking River Cruise. Which I jumped on, the moment the "Kiev to the Black Sea" voyage hit my computer's inbox: ten days of meandering along the Dnieper River with 160 other passengers, taking advantage of Viking's many customer-forward amenities: complimentary wine and beer with meals. A menu that highlights Ukrainian specialties—borscht, chicken Kiev—as well as Chateaubriand, burgers and salmon. Lounging on the sun deck. Nightly entertainment (including an evening of Ukrainian pop singers). Free internet. Free daily excursions, led by friendly, informative guides. And the list goes on.

The company has (admirably) hired Ukrainians to work the ship, from our sweet and sassy dining room servers ("No dessert," said a friend. "Ha!" responded Irina in beyond-fluent English, "For you, double-double-double!") to bus drivers and tour guides (the first such pair named Boris and Natasha. Really.) to a cabin-cleaning crew so swift that my pajamas were folded beneath my pillow before I hit the lavish breakfast buffet. They greeted us on our return from excursions with sweet treats. Lectures explained the country's rich and tumultuous history. Lessons in the Cyrillic alphabet encouraged my lame attempts.

We started in Odessa, a muscular working port anchoring the Black Sea, where Soviet oligarchs came to play in the sun. Russia's Catherine the Great recognized this advantageous location and ordered her French pal, Cardinal Richelieu, to map out a city. His toga-wearing

A solemn monument to the enforced famine caused by Joseph Stalin in the 1930s

statue stands at the top of a huffing climb up Potemkin staircase (named for the general who was her lover—familiar to fans of the movie classic, *Battleship Potemkin*.) Pushkin later lived here; so did Tchaikovsky.

That same Slavic composer was featured at the ultra-Baroque Opera House, where we mingled with local ballet lovers to enjoy *Swan Lake*. The next day, a city tour climaxed at Our Savior Cathedral, ruined by Stalin's orders and today lovingly rebuilt, down to the very last icon, lit by candles of the faithful. Outside, it's ringed by stalls of vendors offering everything from stacking dolls to "bitch blenkets" for use on the river's sandy shores. We also looked for the promised river "rabbits" until we figured out that "rapids" were ahead. (Hey, their English is one hundred percent better than my Ukrainian, where I mastered only a couple of vital words: restaurant and toilet.)

We seized our leisure time to explore Odessa's shopping street, peering into boutiques, discovering a supermarket that rivals Kowalski's, where I purchased bottles of vodka for $1.

We toured Odessa's art museum, a former palace, as it traced its artists' thinking from ornate icons through the Wanderers—who rejected stuffy Classicism in the early 1900s to record real life—on to Impressionist spin-offs and contempo statements. Another tour took us into labyrinths called the catacombs—originally occupied by bandits, then as WW II hideouts for the Resistance: schoolroom, hospital, dorms, kitchen—bold with slogans like "Blood for blood, death for death."

But Odessa's Jews had nowhere to hide. A pogrom of 1905—the most hideous of many—exterminated 2,500, later topped by Romanian Nazi conquerors' murder of 120,000. Of 66 synagogues, two today (which we visited) are active.

Casting off at midnight, we sailed calm waters through forests ripe with birdsong, past anglers casting from docks and kids cannonballing into the water as we approached Zaporozhye, a lively city of 750,000. In a park where once Lenin's statue menaced, young moms gossiped while their toddlers played.

The river divides around a forested island, home of a replica settlement of Cossack outlaws. We peeked into its medieval armory—original helmets, swords, muskets—their barracks, the leader's opulent home (fur bedspread) and a wooden stave church where these early Christians prayed to icons.

On the opposite side of the island, Cossack stuntmen of today put on a show of daredevil riding feats, like hanging upside-down from a saddle as their ponies galloped at warp speed. Whip-cracking tricks and hokey jokes, too. It's crazy fun.

Our next stop, Dnipro, is known for rocket engineering, but its touristic payload is its history. Intriguing exhibits at the National History Museum include idol-like stone images of 700 A.D., on to chainmail of medieval times, and the ornate costumes of Catherine's court. Nearby looms Transfiguration Cathedral. Catherine laid its cornerstone and Stalin transformed it into a Museum of Atheism. Today, ladies in headscarves light candles once again.

Perhaps they were praying for the recent fallen. An open-air diorama brings home the destruction of 2014's revolution: burnt ambulances, shelled tanks, charred ruins and stories of brave civilians, who supplied the rebels with food, clothes, ammunition—and even drove them to the front line.

On a free afternoon, we wandered the main drag, looking for the new Menorah Center. Stopping at a hotel for directions, we were offered a "better" map from the Soviet era—never mind that where we stood was no longer Karl Marx Avenue. A high-school lad proffered directions, then volunteered to accompany us to the center, now a social service outpost for the (tiny) surviving Jewish community. The glorious Golden Rose Synagogue of past days shines as its centerpiece. Scholars with curling forelocks and black yarmulkes continued their scripture lessons as I gazed on the Holy Ark.

The ship next anchored at Kremenchug, a town "unusual because it's usual," explained Nina, our guide: parents pushing strollers in the park (where, of course, once Lenin's statue loomed), teenagers moving to the blast of boom boxes. A Viking perk on every voyage includes a visit to a local family's home, and here we met the matriarch's grandkids and feasted on her homemade slivovitz and pastries as she answered our many questions about how life goes on today.

Finally! Kiev, the capitol itself! We docked aside a festive esplanade—merry go round, Ferris wheel, sidewalk cafes, beanbag chairs for snuggling couple—and for the first time on our voyage, spotted a few fellow tourists. (There's even a McDonald's.) In Kiev's 12th-century Golden Age, the city was twice as big as London.

Today, shiny new high-rises of oligarchs rise amidst the usual grim apartment blocks of Soviet times. The city's emblem is the shining Baroque cathedral called St. Sophia, which avoided Stalin's destruction by serving as a museum. Today its gilded doors, glowing icons and frescoes enrobing every surface broadcast beauty once again. On another hilltop, a collage of monastic buildings circles Lavra Cathedral, where severe saints gaze upward at Christ and Archangels high in the dome.

We ventured into the countryside to stroll through an open-air history lesson—thatched-roof homes of centuries past gathered on the site in a reconstructed village, centered around a glorious wooden stave church.

Then, onward to World War II and a far more grisly setting: the notorious Babi Yar—a deep ravine where Nazis force-marched 150,000 local Jews to line up for execution. Today trees have grown up, monuments have been erected, and a Holocaust Museum is in the planning stage. We return to the town's Jewish neighborhood to visit a synagogue where, once again, life has taken root. Moms from the adjacent apartment complex gather to watch their kids and ply them with ice cream cones.

A gala Captain's Dinner, then time to trade addresses with our ship's new friends, bid goodbye to sassy Irina and her crew, and head to the airport—already planning our next magical cruise. For information, visit VikingRiverCruises.com to put your dreams in motion, too. ■

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The Bakken Museum offers special «garden-side» weddings to make saying «I do» all that more unique. Photo by Julie Dukowitz

Be A Bakken Bride (Or Groom)

Get hitched at the Bakken Museum garden-side venue.

BY KASSIDY TARALA

The Bakken Museum, a Smithsonian affiliate, is known for its world-class collection of historic medical and scientific instruments as well as books, journals, and manuscripts. What is less known to many is that the Bakken Museum doubles as one of the most beautiful and unique wedding venues in the area.

Located in the historic West Winds mansion on Bde Maka Ska, the Bakken Museum has been providing a beautiful wedding landscape to newlyweds for over 25 years. With a focus on science and nature in its museum, it's no wonder that the Bakken Museum's wedding venue incorporates elements from the surrounding landscape.

"The Bakken Museum is surrounded by beautiful landscaping and stunning examples of nature, including three distinctive gardens. The Florence Bakken Medicinal Garden curves around the museum's west side. Inspired by medieval European 'physic' gardens, it features medicinal plantings and a rock fountain with aquatic plants. Garden-side weddings are typically hosted in this serene courtyard space framed by a pergola entwined with flowers," says Angela Julin, manager of events and public operations.

Additionally, guests are welcome to explore the Dakota Native Plants Garden encompassing the wetlands area on the east side of the museum. Julin says it's common to spy deer and other wildlife grazing on the plants and trees.

"The mansion itself was built in 1929, and features Gothic-Tudor stylistic influences with architectural details unique to the property that are a must-see," she says.

Julin says the Bakken Museum is an ideal venue for anyone to get hitched. Inclusive to all, the Bakken Museum has hosted several GLBT weddings, and they encourage more GLBT lovebirds to check out their venue and consider making it their spot to say "I do."

"We strive to be an inclusive community space and welcome all to celebrate with us," Julin says.

The Bakken Museum boasts the ability to comfortably and suitably host a variety of different weddings, regardless of personal style or vision of the couple. Because of its outdoor setting, the Bakken Museum's garden-side weddings are perfect for any wedding, whether it be elegant and formal or natural and casual. With the lake, a number of gardens, and the beautiful historic mansion, it's hard to find a wedding style that would look out of place amongst the lush greenery and breathtaking scenery.

David Beccue and Mark McKone were just one of many GLBT couples married at the Bakken. Photo by Julie Dukowitz

The Bakken Museum, located in Minneapolis, is a science museum that also offers venue rentals, including garden-side weddings. Photo by KatieThering

"The Bakken Museum is located in uptown on Bde Maka Ska; however, our grounds and facility offer guests the chance to enjoy an outdoor wedding, reminiscent of the English Countryside, without leaving the city," Julin says. "We are able to accommodate many unique scenarios with our variety of room rentals to provide everything from intimate experiences to full-mansion fetes."

Though the Bakken Museum is suitable for essentially any and every wedding type, Julin says one thing couples don't need to spend too much time or money on is decorations, because the venue itself is littered with decorations: natural ones.

"We often find that due to the intrinsic beauty of the property, there is minimal need for decorations, which allows the venue to speak for itself, and saves couples time to enjoy their special day! Our rental pricing is all inclusive, so there are no hidden charges, and we take time to get to know each of our couples and their families to provide the best possible experience for all," Julin says. "We also aren't limited to specific caterers, and allow our guests to truly customize their special day."

Whether you're looking to get hitched in a casual outdoor setting with a few of your closest friends and family or tie the knot in a sea of people with the most elegant and glamorous wedding you can imagine, the Bakken Museum is a perfect location for you. Embrace Minnesota's few-but-fierce summer months with an outdoor wedding at the Bakken Museum, and show your guests how to enjoy the views of Bde Maka Ska like never before.

For more information about the Bakken Museum and its wedding venue, visit their website at thebakken.org or explore their social media @thebakkenmuseum. ■

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KIMPTON
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Angel Food Bakery has been a popular source of wedding desserts and catering for the local GLBT community. Photo by Travis Anderson Photo

Eat, Bake, Love

Owners of Amy's Cupcake Shoppe and Angel Food Bakery & Donut Bar share their baking backgrounds and philosophies.

BY KASSIDY TARALA

Dessert can truly transform where you are. One bite of lemon pound cake with a light lemon icing drizzle, and I'm back in third grade eating my mom's homemade recipe at my big sister's birthday party. Whether we choose to dress up or strip down our desserts, one thing remains the same: the memories.

Katy Gerdes, owner of Angel Food, and Amy Brace, owner of Amy's Cupcake Shoppe, have a lot in common. Not only are they both owners of two GLBT-friendly bakeries in the metro, but they've both also fallen completely head-over-heels in love with the art of baking.

Though Gerdes didn't get her start in baking, she eventually found it when she realized she was unhappy with her current life in the fashion industry.

"I went to school for apparel design at Rhode Island School of Design and started a career as a fashion designer, designing for Target and Kohl's, as well as freelancing and working on my own line, and I even competed on season three of *Project Runway*," Gerdes says. "After realizing that I wasn't in love with the fashion industry, I made the difficult choice to change careers and pursue my love of baking. With no schooling or formal training, I started to get jobs as assistant baker and worked my way up to head pastry chef for Hell's Kitchen restaurant in Minneapolis. After four years designing menus and building a bakery program for Hell's Kitchen, I opened my own bakery in 2012, Angel Food Bakery & Donut Bar."

Since then, Gerdes has found great success with her bakery and donut bar. She says they've been called one of the country's "coolest urban bakeries," and they now have a second location at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, making them the first-ever 100-percent-from-scratch bakery in the airport.

Gerdes says much of their clientele are in the GLBT community, though it's hard to say how many of her clientele are because they've become such a strong backbone to her company. One of Angel Food's most iconic creations has even become a symbol of the GLBT community.

"When we opened, we started making rainbow layered cakes. They were not specifically for 'gay weddings' but that became a popular option. I sat down with a wedding tasting one time, and the women very hesitantly said, 'It's a gay wedding, and we would love if you could make us a wedding cake, but does it *have* to be the rainbow cake?' I couldn't help it and started to laugh and said, 'Of course not! How about we just make you a wedding cake, and it can be whatever kind you want,'" Gerdes says.

Overall, Gerdes says her baking style incorporates comforting elements of classic baked goods with fun designs and whimsical flavors, such as her French cruller glazed with honey, rosemary, and brown-butter or her peanut butter cookie spiced up with curry powder, white chocolate, and potato chips.

"Flavor is always the priority, but I also try to bring some of my design background into baking to create treats that are *almost* too pretty to eat," she says.

Like Gerdes, baking has always been Brace's one true love that took a little time to find. Having been baking with her mother since she was a little girl, baking had always been a strong part of Brace's life, but she says she actually grew up wanting to be a doctor.

"I always wanted to be a doctor and eventually became a CT Technologist at the University of Minnesota Hospital for ten years. I started watching *Cupcake Wars* and would practice new recipes and bring them in to work. People would always say how good they were and suggested maybe I should do that instead. So I did," Brace says. "I started making cupcakes and cakes for friends and family and did my first wedding cake

in 2014. That year, I also did the Minnetonka Farmers Market and started to grow my customer base. I did five weddings that year and grew to 36 weddings the next year. In 2016, I opened my first brick-and-mortar shop in Hopkins right on Main Street."

Like Angel Food, Amy's Cupcake Shoppe makes everything from scratch. Brace says you can always tell when something is homemade with love, which she ensures is shown in every product they offer.

"We've had the opportunity to provide desserts for so many weddings over the years. We offer a wide variety of desserts including cupcakes, cakes, French macarons, Belgian waffles, mini pies and tarts, mini cheesecakes, and many more amazing things. We aren't just cupcakes, and we have had so much fun creating dessert tables for couples. We also have options for gluten free, vegan, and many other options as well. If you have a special foods need, we are more than happy to try making it," Brace says.

Having experience with owning and operating successful businesses, Brace and Gerdes both agree that inclusivity is an important ingredient to every recipe.

"Everyone should be able to eat delicious desserts at their wedding, and what a more joyous occasion than being surrounded by your biggest supporters and favorite people in all the world. Weddings should be filled with love and delicious dessert. We love including everyone from every background at the shoppe. Besides desserts, love is our favorite," Brace says.

Gerdes says when she initially started Angel Food, she wasn't setting out to become known as a GLBT-friendly bakery, but she's glad they are today.

"I'm incredibly sad that there is even a need for places to be known as being friendly towards the GLBT community. We opened the bakery in 2012, and I remember distinctly the conversation my mom, who is my business partner, and I had about the bakery voicing our support on the 'Vote No' Marriage Amendment campaign. We both strongly believed against the marriage amendment, but knowing we were a fledgling business, we were nervous to use that voice and possibly lose business," Gerdes says. "Ultimately, it came down to deciding what was more important when history is written. Do we want to be remembered for having a successful business, or do we want to know we stood up for what is right? Once we thought of it in those terms, there was no question about what to do."

For more information about Angel Food Bakery & Donut Bar and Amy's Cupcake Shoppe, visit their websites at angelfoodmn.com and amyscupcakeshoppe.com. ■

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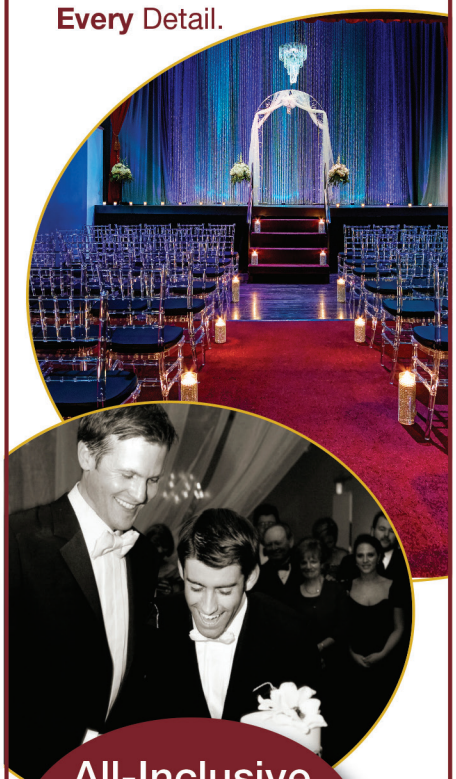
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Strike A Pose

Style expert and wardrobe consultant Sara Rogers shares her story of modeling and fashion.

BY KASSIDY TARALA

The fashion industry is like a second home to local model, style expert, and trend specialist Sara Rogers. With over 20 years of experience in print and runway modeling, if anyone knows how to work the spotlight, it's Rogers. After finding much of her own success in modeling, Rogers decided to help others find the same confidence and beauty by becoming a modeling/personal development instructor, which she won an Outstanding Instructor award for. Soon after winning the award, Rogers' career started to skyrocket.

"One day the fashion coordinator at Dayton's asked me to help train a few new runway models. That position evolved into me training aspiring models, choreographing and calling fashion shows in Dayton's regional markets. From there I was offered the position to become a spokesperson for Dayton's," Rogers says. "It started with commentating prom fashion shows, and it went so well it lead to various opportunities including conducting workday casual wardrobe seminars for businesses locally and in Dayton's regional markets."

Model and style expert Sara Rogers is also a trend specialist for the Mall of America. Photo courtesy of the Mall of America

Since her days at Dayton's, Rogers has continued to flourish in her passion for style as a trend specialist at the Mall of America. Rogers also started her own wardrobe business, and was handpicked by Stacy London from What Not To Wear as a wardrobe consultant for her Style For Hire wardrobe consulting agency.

But before all of this success, Rogers' interests in the fashion industry began with her first career: modeling.

"I was introduced to modeling when my cousin Sandy shared her comic books with (my sister and me). One of the comic books was about models working for the Hanover Modeling Agency, and the models in the magazine inspired me. I auditioned to model for Dayton's runway division three years in a row. They rejected me, but I kept coming back," she says. "One day, I had a light bulb idea to dress up like one of the models I saw in the magazine, and it worked. Fashion coordinator Karen Pedro booked me for my first modeling job. It was at that point that I learned the importance of dressing for the job you want, not the job you have."

Since then, Rogers has been finding her own inspiration while inspiring others with her work in fashion, modeling, and instructing. In her current jobs, Rogers helps people manage their wardrobes and determine the best looks for them, all while keeping their budgets in mind.

"There is an art and a science to looking your personal best, and I've learned a lot from being in the industry for as long as I have. I love empowering individuals with the knowledge they need to look and feel confident about their style. My tagline is 'Making Life Easier For My Clients,'" Rogers says.

She says her job as a style expert and wardrobe consultant involves conducting wardrobe seminars for businesses and groups, working one-on-one with individuals, and providing services like shopping your own closet, closet audit, image enhancement sessions, special occasion and personal shopping, and sharing wardrobe management tips.

As a trend specialist at the Mall of America, Rogers discusses fashion trends on television, radio, and in print. She says she most often sees trends from New York and Milan, though the Mall of America represents middle America.

"I'm fortunate to be in a role I love. I work closely with the MOA marketing team to stay abreast of fashion trends," Rogers says. "With tens of millions of visitors every year and the vast amount of stores, it's a treasure trove for finding fashion trends."

In regards to upcoming wedding trends, Rogers says she is expecting a heavy influence from Megan Markle and Prince Harry's wedding. Additionally, she says statement-making trends such as bold flowers, ruffles, feathers, bows, sparkle detailing, and jumpsuits are also upcoming wedding trends. However, Rogers says traditional wedding styles will always reign supreme.

"I work a lot with individuals attending weddings and I frequently hear the request for outfits that are classic with a twist. One of my GLBT clients recently chose a beautiful suit and tie but added Pride sneakers instead of traditional dress shoes," she says.

Even when individuals opt for a more traditional wedding style, it's always possible to add your own unique twist with statement pieces—whether that be Pride sneakers or colorful accessories.

Rogers says it's important for any GLBT couple to be open and discuss their ideas, thoughts, and wishes for their wedding style to maintain open communication throughout the wedding planning process. That way, couples can be confident that they are beginning their married lives with a shared vision rather than two separate ones. She also suggests that everyone plans their wedding style according to their personal size and body shape to find a style that is flattering and makes them feel confident.

"Buy items that fit you now, not aspirational. Be true to your style and dress for your shape. Decide what colors delight your spirit and also flatter your complexion. Think about your photos and how things will photograph, some things look good in person, yet they don't read the same way in print," she says.

For more information about Sara Rogers, visit her website at sararogers.com. ■

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LEATHER LIFE | BY STEVE LENIUS

Twenty-Five Years in Leather

The Leather Community, Then and Now

Twenty-five years ago this month, in August, 1993, I bought my first leather vest. Then, wearing it, I attended my first monthly Atons Leather/Levi Dinner.

Hey, everybody's gotta start somewhere.

Leather in 1993 was about—well, leather. And maybe a bit of latex or rubber. And a whole lot of tattoos, piercings and other body modification. But much of what is part of the scene today was not around in 1993, or at least I didn't see it. Gear, as in sports or athletic gear, was not yet a thing. Nor was puppy play. Nor was cosplay (costume play) and superhero outfits. Motorcycle riders wore black leather rather than padded suits in bright colors with aggressive patterns.

The crowds I saw at leather gatherings in 1993 consisted primarily of gay weathermen along with a few leather lesbians. It was not until several years later that I started to meet members of the pansexual/heterosexual BDSM community. A few of the gay leathermen and leather lesbians I met in 1993 would later either come out as bisexual or would change their gender—but in 1993 these people felt a need to keep these feelings under the radar rather than risk community disapproval and rejection.

The leather community of 1993 was still being oppressed by the AIDS crisis. Many community members had died and many more seemed destined for the same fate. I met some great guys only to lose them. And I heard fond remembrances of many more men whom I wished I could have gotten to know. It wasn't until 1995, when the first AIDS drug cocktails were introduced, that things started to seem a little less bleak. But even with the introduction of new AIDS therapies, the leather community continued to lose members who died long before their time. And for the rest of the decade, I still attended far too many funerals and memorial services.

The leather community's main turf in 1993 was a bar called "The Men's Room" behind the big dance floor area in the Gay 90's bar complex. It was pretty much a men-only space because the only way to enter the bar was through the men's restroom. (Another entrance was added later to allow women to attend leather parties and events in the space.) Larger leather events such as title contests and fundraisers often were held at the Gay 90's in the dance floor area, often on Sunday afternoons.

In 1993, there were four leather clubs in the Twin Cities: the Atons and the Black Guard were men's leather clubs, while the Knights of Leather and the Minnesota Leather Den were women's leather clubs. Leather titles active in 1993 included Mr. Minnesota Leather, Ms. Minnesota Leather, Mr. Minnesota Drummer, and Mr. Gay 90's Leather.

There was a leather shop in the Gay 90's, but it seemed to be tucked away and the hours were sporadic.

Twenty-five years later, The Atons still are the oldest leather club in the Twin Cities, while the Black Guard has less of a community presence. Of the leather clubs for women mentioned above, the Minnesota Leather Den is no longer active, but the Knights of Leather now is thriving as a pansexual leather club.

None of the Minnesota leather titles of 1993 are active today. In 1994, I became the last person to hold the Mr. Minnesota Drummer title (the title sash is still in my leather closet as I write this). Through the years, however, many other Minnesota leather titles have risen to take their place.

The leather community of 1993 that I joined has become the leather/BDSM/fetish community of today. Even having watched its evolution, I am still pleasantly astonished at what the community has become—truly a rainbow spectrum of so many kinds of diversity. The community's members are gay, lesbian, bi, trans, heterosexual, pansexual, genderqueer, gender-fluid, non-binary, and other variations of gender and preference that I could not have imagined in 1993. In addition to all the interests and activities I saw in 1993, today there are many others, including a thriving group of pups and handlers. Women, trans men and trans women are more visible and more active. While I met people of color in the community in 1993, I see many more today.

Many of the people I knew in 1993 are no longer around for one reason or another. I still cherish their memory. Happily, a few people who welcomed me when I showed up in 1993 still are here today and still are active in the community. I treasure them. And I treasure the fact that they, and I, still are here after all these years.

Another thing that still is here 25 years later: the Atons continue to invite the community to their monthly L&L (leather/levi) dinners, and I continue to enjoy attending them.

Oh, and I still have that leather vest I bought 25 years ago. And, if I don't close the snaps, I can still wear it. ■

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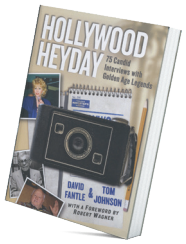
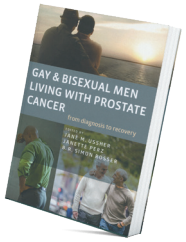


Hollywood Heyday: 75 Candid Interviews with Golden Age Legends

David Fantle & Tom Johnson
McFarland & Co.
$39.95

The authors, native Minnesotans, were eighteen when they made their first trip to interview Hollywood's greats, beginning with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly in 1978. This bit of information is taken from the first page of the foreword written by Robert Wagner. *That* Robert Wagner. The book was forty years in the making: worth every minute to bring it to fruition. Stars such as Don Rickles, Karl Malden, Bob Newhart, Bob Hope, Cyd Charisse, James Cagney, Lucille Ball, even Wagner himself open up to the two, giving the reader a glimpse into their lives and into the lives of their interviewers. Start at the beginning and work through, pick and choose at random; either way, you'll become immersed in this Milky Way of Hollywood luminaries.

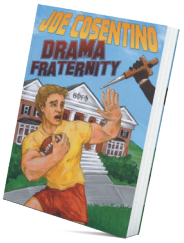


Gay and Bisexual Men Living with Prostate Cancer: From Diagnosis to Recovery

Ed. Jane M. Ussher, Janette Perz, B.R. Rosser

Like the publisher's previous *LGBTQ Hospice and Palliative Care*, this volume is aimed specifically to the medical community treating gay and bi patients with prostate cancer. In a similar fashion, the text describes the most current developments and treatments of the disease. Beyond the proliferation of research the field, the editors present portraits of individuals coping not only with the disease, but with their difficulties and confusion of being gay or bi while dealing with what one calls the prevailing "heterosexist world" of his doctors and caregivers. Patients will find the information useful and reassuring, while oncologists, urologists, and mental health practitioners can learn first-hand the additional difficulties and concerns gay and bi men face after a diagnosis of prostate cancer. A clear and compelling read.

Drama Fraternity



Joe Cosentino
Joe Cosentino
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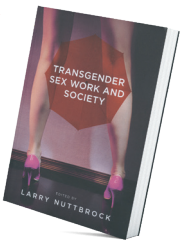
Cosentino's *Drama Fraternity,* the sixth Nicky and Noah mystery, arrives to float beach readers through dog days and daiquiris. Treemeadow College's theater professor Nicky Abbondanza is using the football fraternity house as a set and frat boys as actors to film his slasher movie, *Tight End Scream Queen*, also co-staring his husband and colleague Noah Oliver. As fans who have already read *Drama -Queen, -Muscle, -Cruise, -Luau*, and *-Detective* will anticipate, the bodies begin to fall fast and furiously, many stricken by a daggered cross wielded by an unknown hand. Subplots include an attempt to have Nicky and Noah's adopted son, Taavi, taken away, and the movie shut down altogether, but the indomitable pair, refreshed by invigorating between-the-sheets play in the evening, arise to keep evil at bay. BYO suntan oil.

Transgender Sex Work and Society



Ed. Larry Nuttbrock
Harrington Park Press
$75 Hardcover / EBook $45

This ambitious book is the first to synthesize the complexities of trans sex workers lives, here in the United States and world-wide. Essays Included discuss the factors leading to MTF trans prostitution that include need for money to transition, lack of education, drug addiction, and/or minority status. The general public may have had a glimpse of this world through Ryan Murphy's TV series, *Pose*, that puts a face on the House Ball community of the late 1980s New York City. Self-identified as transmasculine, Sel Hwang's first chapter in the volume, "QualitativeDescription of Sex Work among Transwomen in New York City," puts a scholarly face on this same topic. Some forty contributors worldwide cover mental health, substance abuse, legal issues faced by trans sex workers. ■

RIDE REVIEW | BY RANDY STERN | PHOTOS BY RANDY STERN

2018 Kia Stinger

In the past, larger hatchbacks had been hit-or-miss on in this country.

The first Volkswagen Dasher was a hit. It introduced us to a new kind of car from the Wolfsburg brand: water cooled front-engine with front wheel drive. But that was the mid-1970s, when there was an oil crisis and larger American cars were getting pummeled with blame for being inefficient.

Since the Dasher, there had been other cars. I recall the Merkur Scorpio, which was a 1980s European Ford sold at Lincoln-Mercury dealers. It was a well-designed car, but due to a lack of execution for the price it was commanding, it was unsuccessful.

A few decades later, Audi tried its hand on a large hatchback: the A7. Because of its Audi Sport variants—namely the hot RS7—it was a smash hit here in this country. This was followed up by the A5 Sportback, which also had its share of buyers here in the USA.

BMW had several hatchback models for the 3-, 4-, and the 5-Series. They had fastback versions of their SAV (read: SUV) lineup, the X4, and X6. All of these models had added some success to the Bavarian car marker.

The next entry to this list comes from the Republic of Korea. Lately, they have been adding luxury and performance cars to their portfolios to some success. It may have come as a surprise to some that Kia had created a large hatchback of their own. One that offers a lineup of turbocharged engines mounted on a rear-drive platform.

It sounds like a superb idea… except for one little problem: the badge.

Kia had been known for budget-to-mainstream models that appealed to the masses. Yet, they also dabbled in premium offerings, such as the Cadenza and K900. The idea behind the Kia Stinger was to create a halo car towards the upper end of the lineup that offered hatchback practicality, sports sedan performance, and great styling.

The buzz was loud and positive from our fellow media. It was our turn to find out whether the Kia Stinger will hit the premium car jackpot with this four-door sports hatchback and if the buzz is as good as everyone else had reported.

It begins with a sleek fastback look. The front end is lower than a lot of Kia models, but the "tiger" grille fits perfectly in-between a set of LED headlamp units. The hood is long, but that indicates its rear-drive roots. The roofline is swept back with a glasshouse taken from several Kia models, cutting short to a long C-Pillar blind spot area. The hatchback opens up from the bumper for enough room to load/unload cargo and luggage. LED tail lamps and bridged by a single strip crowing the rear end.

Our GT2 tester adds 19-inch alloy wheels exposing a Brembo four-disc braking system. This trim level also adds a specific grille texture with a protector for the driver's assistance guide, additional lower aerodynamic aids up front and around the car, plus four exhaust tips and a diffuser.

The sporty atmosphere continues inside. This is the first Kia with a truly driver-focused cockpit with a low cowl, an instrument binnacle with a lot of information available to the driver, a heads-up display that is clear and informative, a steering wheel with the right controls for the adaptive cruise, infotainment system, the information screen between the dials, and the paddle shifters for the automatic transmission.

The center console features a shift-by-wire shifter that is a bit tricky to work for reverse and drive. The park button is behind the shifter. You also have a small knob for the drive modes—which there are five to choose from.

On top of the center stack is a tablet-like eight-inch screen for the UVO-driven infotainment system. Harmon Kardon provided 15 speakers of superb surround sound throughout the cabin. You can connect your smartphone through Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, as well as a choice of various sources for entertainment.

Our GT2 tester came with well-bolstered seats upholstered in a deep red Nappa leather. There is plenty of comfort to be had, but it is also supportive when doing more spirited journeys. Both the driver and front passenger seat have power rake, height, and recline adjustments, plus lumbar and seatback bolster adjustments as well. The rear seats are also upholstered in the same red Nappa leather and offer plenty of comfort. Legroom is great, but taller people will have to watch their heads as it will rest where the roofline starts sloping rearward.

The hatchback opens up to a cargo space that is expandable to 23.3 cubic feet. The rear seats fold down in a 60/40 split. The space behind the rear seat is long, but not deep.

Stinger models offer two choices in engine performance. Standard is a new 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine with 255 horsepower. Choosing any of the three GT models will upgrade you to a twin-turbocharger 3.3-liter V6 engine with 365 horsepower. Either engine is connected to an eight-speed automatic transmission sending power initially to the rear wheels. Our tester had the available all-wheel-drive system.

Needless to say, our Stinger GT2 AWD tester is very quick. It is also quite fast. The reason to buy a Stinger GT over the four-cylinder model is performance that has never been seen on a Kia—ever. And it is quite refreshing! However, we did observe an average for fuel economy of 22.7 MPG.

Being quick and fast means optimal vehicle control. The Stinger exhibits that with sharp reflexes and confidence through the curves. The handling is pretty darn good. The suspension setup is on the firm side, you can track-ready firmness in Sport mode. On the highway, there is plenty of feedback from the suspension system into the car, but it also has a high degree of control that enables the system to absorb road imperfections the best it can. We also like the grip from the Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tires shod on our tester.

Steering feel is superb with equally sharp reflexes from the wheel. On-center feel is good in all modes, which helps in maintaining control on turns and on the Interstate. Brakes are superb with excellent pedal feel and response. We found the Stinger to stop well in normal and panic situations.

Selecting the GT2 adds a suite of driver assistance features that work extremely well and will come in handy. These driver assistance features include front and rear Parking Distance Warning, Blind Spot Collision Warning with Lane Change Assist, Rear Cross Traffic Collision Warning, Forward Collision Avoidance Assist with Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning System, Advanced Smart Cruise Control with Stop and Go, Lane Departure Warning System, Lane Keep Assist System, and Driver Attention Warning.

You can get the new Kia Stinger starting from $31,900 for a four-cylinder, rear-drive model that is far from basic in equipment content. Our GT2 AWD tester resides at the top end of the lineup, with a sticker price of $52,300 as tested.

If you do not pay attention to the badge on the front end, rear end, and the steering wheel, the Kia Stinger is a superb premium sports hatchback. It makes no apologies for the way it looks, or the way it drives. It is a great car for those looking for something different that is beyond just being sporty: select the right model, and your pulse is immediately quickened.

As for matching up the buzz the Kia Stinger garnered, when you drive around and people crane their necks in its direction, we can confirm that the hype is real. So is the badge. To every Soul, Forte, Sportage, Sorento, and Optima owner: you now have got a Kia that will fly your flag proudly. ■

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OUR VOICES

SKIRTING THE ISSUES | BY ELLEN KRUG

Road Trip

"Tell me another story."

I looked over to the passenger seat at my 26-year-old daughter, Meredyth, and smiled. I had just shared a story about life when I was my former self, presenting as man. It was nice to find that she'd been listening and even better, that she was interested.

We were on the tail end of a 500-plus mile weekend trip to Grand Marais, Minnesota for its Pride Day celebration where I was a featured speaker. It had been a long time since MP (a nickname earned when she was barely a newborn) and I had been in a car together, let alone on a marathon road trip that included multiple construction delays and early morning white knuckle vigilance for darting deer.

"Oh, I don't know," I answered. "I'd rather hear about what's going on with you."

My daughter has an unconventional life, which she partly attributes to me.

"You taught me to live authentically, to be true to who I am," she's said. It helped that she lived with me in Iowa while a high school student after the divorce (due to my coming out as transgender); without wavering an iota, this kid stuck with me throughout a family breakup as I journeyed to womanhood, a rare gift of loyalty at a time when I desperately needed such gifts.

Still, MP's much her own person. We had quite a row over her studying and even valuing good grades. Eventually, I gave up on cajoling her and proposed Plan B.

"No one will ever care about what grade you got in sophomore biology," I started. "So, all I ask is that you actually graduate from high school, that you get a diploma. Beyond that, I'll quit nagging you about grades and studying."

I saw MP's eyes widen as a wry smile crossed her face. Yes, she had won the studying battle, just like she'd won so many other battles growing up.

"But," I added, "You have to replace studying with something that you're passionate about and that you devote yourself to." I wasn't about to let her off the hook completely.

"Okay, Dad," she replied. "I promise to do that."

A couple weeks later, MP asked for a ride to downtown Cedar Rapids.

"I'm going to volunteer for a guy named Barack Obama who's running for president," she announced. "I don't know anything about him other than he talks about changing our country. And with Bush in there, we're in need of real change."

With that, my daughter's life trajectory was altered. In 2007 at age 15, she put in 60-hour weeks for the entire summer making calls and doing cajoling of her own—I heard that she'd earned the nickname "Tiger," because she wouldn't let folks off the phone until they agreed to vote for Obama.

The acceptance she received by her campaign coworkers was an unexpected bonus for my child who had long suffered from anxiety about being liked and fitting in.

Later, MP would attend Augsburg University where she also worked for the DFL and Sen. Al Franken. Following graduation, it was a year-plus as a paid campaign worker for Bernie. After that, it was stints on other campaigns in Seattle, New Hampshire, and Iowa.

Burned out from a nomadic life, she settled in New Orleans with a job at a youth hostel that provided her housing. Spending money came via a bike delivery job. To say that she lived on the edge would be generous, but I respected that she was doing it her way, without feeling the need to conform to a society where at her age, she's expected to have a job with benefits, a romantic relationship, and roots. Nope, none of that was for MP.

Her visit to Minneapolis-turned Grand Marais was a stop on the way to Korea to teach English to elementary kids. The fact that Korea might be the epicenter of World War III doesn't faze her one bit.

I wish I could say the same for me.

The road trip to Grand Marais was our first prolonged time together in two years. I heard about boyfriends, hostel life, and the art of using a bike box to not only transport her beloved bike, but double as luggage for almost every piece of clothing she owns. *She's certainly innovative*, I thought.

Most of all, as we drove north into the woods along Lake Superior and then back south, I returned to the idea of a *gift*—to have my daughter there at my side, loving me, after all I had put her through with breaking up our family so that I could be *me*.

And now to think that she's out in the world being true to herself, in part because I showed her the way.

Gift.

There's no other word that even comes close. ■

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change *(2013). She speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign up for her newsletter, The Ripple. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.*

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